DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 843 PS 017 980

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TITLE The Growth of Values: Who Is Admired and Why?
PUB DATE 30 Apr 89
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Kansas City, MO, April 27-30, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *College Students; *Elementary School Students; Higher Education; Intermediate Grades; Parochial Schools; Private Education; Public Education; *Sex Differences; *Values
IDENTIFIERS *Admiration

ABSTRACT

This study examined the kinds of people students admire and the criteria for their admiration. Large numbers of fourth and fifth graders and college students wrote brief essays in which they named individuals they admired and gave their reasons for naming the individuals. The following year, children in grades 2-6 in several schools wrote about the person or persons they most admired and the reasons for their admiration. Many children wrote about admiration of an entertainer or sports figure. Their justification for the nomination often focused on the skill and competence of the individual. For example, many girls admired Debby Gibson because she writes her own songs and has achieved success in her teens. More commonly, children admired one or both parents or a relative or teacher. The admiration of parents and other relatives and friends persisted in college students, and their justification shifted from what the parent did for the child to the admirable qualities of the parent. (RJC)

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Draft of a paper presented at the 1989 Meetings of SRCD, Kansas City, April 30

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The Growth of Values: Who is Admired and Why?

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Although the development of a personal value system is one of the major life tasks confronting every individual, with the notable exception of studies of moral judgment, there has been little systematic investigation of this process. The work to be reported today is part of a project designed to remedy that deficiency by providing descriptive evidence about who an individual admires and the criteria for admiration. I begin with the assumption that one's personal pantheon, like other aspects of knowledge, is a personal creation influenced by life experience. I also assume that it is readily accessible under direct questioning but, clearly, how robust results will be over variation of method is an important question to be investigated. As a consequence of the first assumption, as well as all we know about the process of identification and its role in the development of childrens' personalities, it would be expected that children would be more likely than adults to admire someone who is personally known and liked. In addition, children would be expected to make less of a differentiation in response to questions about a) who is liked? b) who is personally admired? c) who is held in high regard by society at large? or d) the opposite of those questions.

Method

For a start I asked large numbers of grade school and college students tested as a class group, to write a brief essay. Members of a large lecture class in adolescent psychology were given two sheets of paper with instructions at the top. The instructions represented all possible pairs of the six sets of instructions noted above. A similar assignment was given to fourth and fifth graders in an East Brunswick public school by their regular class room teacher. In that case the two essays were produced on different occassions rather than a single session. In all cases the essay required naming one or more individuals fitting the assigned

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property and giving the reason for naming them. I'll describe the results for only two of the six instructions: UA, asked for listing of persons universally held in high regard; PA asked for listing of persons considered to be admirable and personally admired by the respondent.

Additional essays from school children were collected the following year from children in grades 2 through 6 of an East Brunswick parochial school, the Solomon Schecter School, and from children in grades 4 and 5 of the same public school tested a year before (where some of the fifth graders had participated the previous year as fourth graders). The instruction for both groups was: "Identify the person or persons you most admire and give the reason(s) for your admiration." Children in the public school also completed a rating scale designed to check the reliability of nominations.

Results

Comparison of Universal and Personal admiration in children and adults. The mean number of individuals nominated by college students was 3.3 for PA and 3.8 for UA. In both conditions men gave more nominations than women: 4 vs. 3.4 and 5.4 vs. 3.4 for PA and UA respectively. Children gave fewer nominations than adults. As for the nature of the nominations, practically all could be classified into one of the categories shown in Table 1: Personal (relative, friend, teacher); Political (US and world leaders); Humanitarian/religious (Martin L King, Jr. or Mother Theresa were frequent examples); Intellectual (writers, composers, scientists); and Visibles (entertainers, athletes, ballplayers and other sports figures).

As should be evident from inspection of Figure 1, the nominations of children differ from those of adults but at both age levels there is evidence of sex differences and instruction effects. For PA the most common nomination is someone personally known, usually one or both parents or a friend. Children use this category somewhat more frequently than adults and, at all ages, females use it more heavily than do males. As we shall see shortly, peers figure more prominently in ratings by females. The next most popular category of PA for children is

Visible persons, which is used three times more often by boys than for girls--mostly for ball players. While adults also admire visibles they tend to nominate persons from other categories as well; for males distribution of nominations across categories is fairly uniform whereas for women humanitarians are second most commonly nominated after friends and family with political and intellectual figures being mentioned hardly at all.

For Universally Admired persons children, like the adult respondents to the Gallup poll, mention world political figures, mostly the President of the US. Differences between boys and girls are decreased with the exception that boys nominate intellectual figures whereas girls do not. The same sex difference appears among adults. Men most commonly nominate intellectual or humanitarian figures whereas women nominate humanitarian or political figures.

The criteria of nomination. Although each respondent described the criterion for nomination in his/her own words there were common recurrent themes. The themes and the proportion of subjects who listed them are shown in Table 2. One complication in interpreting these data arises from the fact that most subjects listed more than one criterion. For children accomplishment, as reflected in Attainment of fame or success, is a major criterion-- especially for boys for whom it is most frequent in both UA and PA. Personal qualities of the individual (usually described adjectivally: caring, sincere, hardworking, etc) are an important determinant of PA for both children and adults: for adults, especially women, they are the most commonly cited criterion; for children they are second in frequency, exceeded by accomplishment for boys and relationship to the individual for girls (help me, share, etc). Another important difference to be noted is the increasing use by adults of descriptors like triumph over hardship and adversity, or commitment to belief, qualities that are rarely, if ever, mentioned by children. For adults these qualities figure more prominently in PA than in UA.

Closer examination of differences in PA for boys and girls. ~~What~~ The impression that arose for me from examination of the data just considered smacked very much of differences between values of men and women described by Bakan (1966) in terms of agency vs. communion or by Gilligan (1982) in terms of justice vs interpersonal relations. What was surprising was how early that difference must arise to be so clearly evident among fourth and fifth graders. In order to examine that difference in more detail, additional data on Personal Admiration were gathered. They are shown in Tables 3, 4, 5. In Table 3 only the first person listed is considered; CS1 and CS2 refer to first and second year for public school children, SS to the parochial school children. The first category of Table 1 has been subdivided into elders and peers in Table 3. An important difference between girls and boys in PA emerges as a result: girls admire peers as much as parents and teachers whereas boys do not. A certain amount of caution is advised in interpretation, however, because the difference is much less marked among parochial school students, all of whom have more admiration for elders. Another ground for caution is that although there is great consistency in the two samples of public school girls, that is not true of the boys where the second year sample are more like their girl counterparts than the first year sample. Nevertheless, the greater admiration of boys for ball players continues to hold up.

An additional feature that emerged was the strong correlation of sex of respondent and sex of the person admired. In this case, data for all nominees was considered to determine whether all nominees were male, or female or not (as, e.g., would be the case if mom and dad were named rather than one or the other). Not only do girls tend to admire women and boys men but also the pattern is assymetrical, especially for the parochial school boys.

The criterion for nomination shown in Table 5, like the identity of the nominee in Table 3, are based upon only the first nominee. Once again, it appears that accomplishment is a more important determinant of admiration for boys than for

girls. Here, too, the parochial shool children seem to differ from their public school counterparts, in this case, differences between girls and boys are greatly reduced. In the second year data of public school children, contributions of the individual admired to the child loom large for both boys and girls-- in large part because children express appreciation for all the things that their parents do for them or, in the case of peers, because of shared interests and activities. Finally, personal qualities of the admired person are commonly mentioned. These include not only interpersonal qualities like "kind", "helpful", but also physical characteristics such as "pretty" or "strong" as well as skills such as "funny" or "good ball player". These properties often suggested that the child wanted to be like the admired person but only reasons including "I want to be like .." or its equivalent were classified as indicating role modelling. In this regard, both girls and boys in the parochial school sample were much more explicit in acknowledging role modelling (e.g., "I admire my mother. She is a phisesist. I would like to be a phisesist when I grow up" from a fourth grade girl).

Discussion

The media often report surveys of unidentified origin showing that children admire sports figures and entertainers with the implication that children's values are shallow. Although many children in the present study also wrote about their admiration of an entertainer or a sports figure, their justification of the nomination often focused upon the skill and competence of the individual. That school children, who devote many hours in school specifically developing competence in many socially valued skills as well as many hours outside of school again in pursuit of competence, should be so focused upon competence is,thus, not very surprising. For example, many girls admired Debby Gibson because she writes her own songs and has acheived success in her teens. Similarly many boys chose a particular ball player for skill at the same position they play. Such essays were far more typical than those of, e.g., four fifth grade girls swooning over Kirk Cameron. More commonly, however, children admire one or both parents

or a relative or teacher-- a finding that I don't recall ever having heard reported although it is in far better accord with expectations based upon psychological theory. The admiration of parents and other relatives and friends persists in college students but, here, the justification offered tends to shift from what the parent does for the child to admirable qualities of the parent as a person to be emulated.

A final point, although the adults tested were writing an essay for a stranger walking into their class--clearly an opportunity for leg pulling--I am impressed with the serious and personal quality of the replies. Who do you admire and why? seems to be a meaningful and absorbing question for the subjects addressed. It is high time that it received more serious attention from investigators of human development.

References

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Table 1. Percent of all nominations in category

	Children				Adults			
	PA		UA		PA		UA	
Category of Nominee	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Relative, Friend, Teacher Employer, Co-worker, etc.	45	76	2	21	37	58	11	15
U.S and World Leaders	2	1	36	36	20	8	11	23
Humanitarian, Religious	2	3	8	13	10	18	32	33
Intellectual: Artist, writer scientist, inventor.	5	5	19	1	20	3	35	3
Entertainer, Athlete, Sportsfigure, Wealthy person	45	15	35	26	13	12	11	19

Table 2. Percent of group invoking the criterial feature.[1]

	Children				Adults			
	PA		UA		PA		UA	
Criterial Feature	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Contributions to Society		6	34	41	36	10	50	29
Contributions to Person	35	55		8	18	2		9
Role in Society		4	13	26			33	36
Attainment of Fame, Success	50	35	58	37	36	26	24	49
Value of Goal				2		2	8	4
Personal Attributes, Gen.	41	41	18	16	46	67	42	20
Commitment to Belief	6	4			27	14		16
Expenditure of Effort	3	2	3	2	9	4		
Triumph over Adversity			3		36	28	8	7
Self-sacrifice for Others		2				12		24
Model, Identify with	21	14	3	4		2		11
Number of Subjects	34	49	38	49	11	51	12	45

[1] Table note: Columns do not sum to 100 because each S may list several features.

Table 3. Who are personally admired?

Sex differences in percent of first nomination by category for three replications.

Category	Female				Male				Total N
	CS2	CS1	SS	All	CS2	CS1	SS	All	
Parents, Teachers, Older Relatives	40	40	39	40	47	17	31	34	55, 42
Peers (Friends, Siblings, Cousins)	44	43	15	36	17	28	3	16	50, 20
Political, Humanitarian, Intellectual	7	6	15	9	8	6	9	7	12, 9
Sports, Entertainers, Athletes, etc.	9	11	30	15	28	50	57	43	20, 53
N for column	57	47	33	137	53	36	35	124	261

Table 4. Sex of nominee by sex of nominator, percent

Sex of Nominee	Female				Male				Total N
	CS2	CS1	SS	All	CS2	CS1	SS	All	
Female	61	68	58	63	11	14	3	10	86, 12
Male	14	13	30	18	62	81	83	73	24, 91
Other	25	19	12	20	26	6	14	17	27, 48
N for column	57	47	33	137	53	36	35	124	261

Table 5. Criteria for Nomination. Percent invoking on first nomination by group and sex

Criterion	Female				Male				Total N
	CS2	CS1	SS	All	CS2	CS1	SS	All	
Contribution to Society	3	4	3		4	0	0		
Contibution to me personally	53	38	9		43	19	3		
Total Contribution	56	42	12	41	47	19	3	27	56, 33
Role Model	5	11	27		11	11	29		
Personal qualities	30	36	15		15	28	18		
Total Attributes	35	49	52	44	28	39	47	37	60, 45
Role in Society	0	0	6		4	3	3		
Attain Fame, fortune, excellence	7	9	25		17	39	44		
Total Attainments	9	9	36	15	25	42	50	37	21, 45
N for column	57	47	33	137	53	36	34	123	260